

WOMAN, CHURCH AND STATE

1893

CHAPTER VIII WOMAN AND WORK

And unto Adam the Lord said; "Cursed be the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herbs of the field; in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground, for dust thou art and into dust thou shalt return." Gen. 3: 17-19.

Upon man was pronounced the curse of the world's work. The Bible declares it was because of *his* sinfulness that the earth was to be cursed; for *his* punishment that he was to eat of it in sorrow all the days of his life; because of *his* wickedness that it was to bear thorns and thistles; and in consequence of *his* disobedience that he was to eat the herb of the field in the sweat of his face until he returned unto the ground from whence he came. No curse of work was pronounced upon woman; her "curse" was of an entirely different character. It was a positive command of the Lord God Almighty, that upon man alone the work of the world should fall and this work he was to perform in sorrow and the sweat of his brow.

Thus far this book has been devoted to a consideration of the doctrines taught by christian men in regard to "woman's curse," and so earnestly has this doctrine been proclaimed that man seems to have entirely forgotten the "curse," also pronounced upon himself or if he has not forgotten, he has neglected to see its full import, and in his anxiety to keep woman in subordination he has placed *his* "curse" also upon

her thus thwarting the express command of God. It is therefore but just to now devote a few pages to the consideration of man's "curse" and an investigation of the spirit in which he has accepted the penalty imposed upon him for his share in the transgression which cost him Paradise. At the commencement of this investigation, it will be well to remember that Eve was not banished from the Garden of Eden, Adam alone was cast out and to prohibit *his* re-entrance, not hers, the angel with the flaming sword was set as guardian at its gates.

We must also recall the opposition of the church through the ages to all attempts made towards the amelioration of woman's suffering at time of her bringing forth children, upon the plea that such mitigation was a direct interference with the mandate of the Almighty and an inexcusable sin. It will be recalled that in the chapter upon witchcraft, the bitter hostility of the church to the use of anaesthetics by the women physicians of that period was shown, and its opposing sermons, its charges of heresy, its burnings at the stake as methods of enforcing that opposition. Man, ever unjust to woman, has been no less so in the field of work. He has not taken upon himself the entire work of the world, as commanded, but has ever imposed a large portion of it upon woman. Neither do all men labor; but thousands in idleness evade the "curse" of work pronounced upon all men alike. The church in its teachings and through its non-preaching the duty of man in this respect, is guilty of that defiance of the Lord God it has ever been so ready to attribute to woman. . . .

From *Woman, Church, and State: A Historical Account of the Status of Women through the Christian Ages: With Reminiscences of the Matriarchate* by Matilda Gage, 2nd ed. (New York: Truth Seeker Company, 1893; reprint, Salem, N. H.: Ayer Company Publishers, Inc., 1985).

... Man, hereditarily unjust to woman under the principles of the Patriarchate and the lessons of Christianity, is even more unjust in the fields of work he has compelled her to enter, than in those of education and the ballot which she is seeking for herself. Organizations, strikes, the eight hour law demand, are largely conducted by men for men. The grim humor originating the proverb "a man's work is from sun to sun, a woman's work is never done," still clings with all its old force to women in most employments. To such small extent has man made the woman worker's cause his own, that instances are to be found even in the United States, where men and women working together and together going out upon a strike, the men have been reinstated at the increase demanded, the women forced to return at the old wages. Nor is our own country the chief sinner in this respect. It was found imperative many years since, among the women of England to organize leagues of their own sex alone, if they desired their own interest in labor to be protected; the male Trades Unions of that country excluding women from some of the best paid branches of industry, as carpet making, cloth weaving, letter press printing. In self defense, the Woman's Protective and Provident League, and a "Woman's Union Labor Journal" were founded. The principle of exclusion has not alone been shown against woman's entrance into well paid branches of work, but in those they have been permitted to enter they have found themselves subjected to much petty annoyance. Among the male painters of pottery a combination was formed to prevent the use by woman of the arm-rests required in this work. Tram-way trains carry London workmen at reduced rates, but a combination was entered into by male laborers to prevent women workers from using the low-priced trains. Nor in many instances are employers less the enemies of women, unions having been found necessary for the purpose of moral protection. A most deplorable evidence of the low respect in which woman is held and the slavery that work and cheap wages mean for her, is the suggestion often made by employers that she shall supplement her wages by the sale of her body. The manager of an industrial league in New York City a few years since found that no young girl

escaped such temptation. Neither extreme youth nor friendliness afforded security or protection but were rather additional inducements for betrayal, most of the victims numbering but fourteen short years. . . .

The terrible condition of working women in Paris, has attracted the attention of the French government. In but three or four trades are they even fairly well paid, and these few require a peculiar adaptation, as well as an expensive training out of reach of most women laborers. And even in these best paid kinds of work, a discrimination in favor of man exists; at the China manufactory at Sévres where the men employed receive a retiring pension, the women do not. From fifteen to eighteen pence represents the daily earnings of the Parisian working girl, upon which sum it is impossible for her to properly support life. Many of these girls die of slow starvation, others are driven into prostitution, still others seek relief in the Seine. French women perform the most repulsive labors of the docks; they work in the mines dragging or pushing heavy trucks of coal like their English sisters, through narrow tunnels that run from the seams to the shaft; eating food of such poor quality that the lessening stature of the population daily shows the result. This decreasing size of Frenchmen especially among the peasantry, the majority not coming up to the regulation army height, has within the last fifteen or twenty years called attention of the government during conscription, yet without seeming to teach its cause as lying in the poor food and hard labor of women, the mothers of these men. The heaviest burdens of porters, the most offensive sanitary work, the severest agricultural labor in that country falls upon woman. "I pity the women, the donkeys, and the boys," wrote Mrs. Stanton when traveling in the south of France. It is the poor nourishment and excessive labor of woman which makes France to-day a country of rapidly decreasing birth-rate, seriously affecting its population and calling the earnest attention of statistical bureaus and physicians to this vital question; a question which affects the standing of France among the nations of the earth. According to the report of

the chief of the statistical bureau, 1890, there were fewer births than deaths that year, the births amounting to 838,059, the deaths to 876,505, an excess of 38,446 deaths. Commenting upon these returns, "Der Reichsbote" of Berlin, attributed the cause to a wide-spread aversion to large families; acknowledging, however, that the lower classes had become weakened and dwarfed by the tasks imposed upon them. What neither the statistical bureau, the press, or the church yet comprehend is the fact that the work imposed upon its Christian women, the "curse" of man thrust upon her, is the chief cause of the lessening size and lessening population of that country. A French gentleman employing a large number of women in a flax factory was appalled at the great amount of infant mortality among the children of his employees. Believing the excessive death rate to be in consequence of the continued labor of women, he released expectant mothers for a month previous, and two months after the birth of a child, with a marked diminution of the death rate. The ordinary food of the peasantry is of poor quality and meager quantity. Those employed in the manufacture of silk largely subsist upon a species of black broth proverbial for its lack of nutritive qualities. The absence of certain elements in food both creates specific diseases and inability to combat disease. . . .

...

Germany, whose women were revered in the centuries before Christianity, now degrades them to the level of beasts. Women and dogs harnessed together are found drawing milk carts in the streets; women and cows yoked draw the plough in the fields; the German peasant wife works on the roads or carries mortar to the top of the highest buildings, while her husband smokes his pipe at the foot of the ladder until she descends for him to again fill the hod. To such extent is woman a laborer that she comes in competition with the railroad and all public methods of traffic. Eight-tenths of the agricultural laborers are women; they plow and sow, and reap the grain and carry immense loads of offal for fertilizing the land. As street cleaners they collect the garbage of towns, work with brooms and shovels to cleanse roadways;

and harnessed alone, or with cows or dogs, perform all the most repulsive labors of the fields and streets. Nor for a knowledge of their work are we dependent upon the statements of travelers, but official documents corroborate the worst. An American consul says of a Circular Upon Labor recently issued by the German government:

An important factor in the labor of Germany is not enquired of in the circular, viz, the labor of dogs. I have heard it estimated that women and dogs harnessed together do more hauling than the railroads and all other modes of conveyance of goods united. Hundreds of small wagons can be seen every day on all the roads leading to and from Dresden, each having a dog for the "near horse" harnessed, while the "off horse" is a woman with her left hand grasping the wagon tongue to give it direction, and the right hand passed through a loop in the rope which is attached to the axle, binding the shoulder; the harnessed woman and dog trudge along together, pulling miraculous loads in all sorts of weather.

The pay of woman for this strange, degrading labor is from ten to twenty-five cents a day. Nor is that of sewing more remunerative. In March, 1892, a libel suit against an embroidery manufacturer brought to light the fact that women in his employ received but five cents a day. No burden in Germany is considered too heavy for woman until the failing strength of old age necessitates a change of occupation, when amid all varieties of weather they take the place of the newsboys of our own country, selling papers upon the streets. Munich, the capital of Bavarian Germany, is famed for its treasury of art; paintings, ancient and modern sculptures, old manuscripts of inestimable value, large libraries and splendid architecture make it the seat of the fine arts. But its women are still victims of Christian civilization. Dresden is another city whose art treasures and architectural beauty has rendered it famous among European cities as the "German Florence." Yet both of these cities employ women in the same kinds of work under the same repulsive conditions that are found in other portions of that empire.

Bavarian men wearing heavy wooden shoes drive their bare-footed wives and daughters before the plough in the field, or harnessed with dogs send them

as carriers of immense loads of merchandise through the cities. Says a writer:

Women become beasts of burden; still they do not grumble; they do not smile either—they simply exist. The only liberty they have is liberty to work; the only rest they have is sleep. The existence of a cow or a sheep is a perpetual heaven, while theirs is a perpetual hell.

In addition to all this out-of-door labor performed by the German women, they have that of the house and the preparation of clothing for the family. They industriously knit upon the street while doing errands; they cook, they spin and make clothing which takes them afar into the night, rearing their children amid labor so severe as forever to drive smiles from their faces, bringing the wrinkles of premature old age in their place. Switzerland, whose six hundredth anniversary was celebrated in 1888, the oldest republic, sees its women carrying luggage and blacking boots as porters at inns; propelling heavily laden barges down its romantic lakes; swinging the scythe by the side of men in the fields; bringing great baskets of hay strapped to their shoulders down the mountain side; carrying litters containing travelers up the same steep mountain top; bringing heavy baskets of fagots from the forests, and carrying in the more pleasant cutting of grapes at the vineyard harvest. From five o'clock in the morning till eight in the evening is the peasant woman's day of work. A stolid expressionless face, eyes from which no soul seems to look, a magnificent body as strong as that of the man by her side, is the result of the Swiss woman's hardships and work. It is but a few years since the laws of Switzerland compelled division of the paternal estate with sisters as well as brothers, this change provoking intense opposition from the men. On the Alps, husbands borrow and lend their wives, one neighbor not scrupling to ask the loan of another's wife to complete some farming task, which loan is readily granted with the understanding that the favor is to be returned in kind. Says one writer:

The farmers in the Upper Alps, though by no means wealthy, live like lords in their houses, while the heaviest portion of agricultural labors devolves upon the wife. It is no uncommon thing to see a

woman yoked to a plough with an ass, while her husband guides it. An Alpine farmer counts it an act of politeness to lend his wife to a neighbor who has too much work, and the neighbor in return lends his wife for a few days labor whenever requested.

In Vienna, women lay the brick in building, while throughout Austria young girls carry mortar for such work. They also work in the fields, in the mines, pave and clean the streets, or like their German sisters, harnessed with dogs, drag sprinklers for the street or serve milk at the customer's door. Prussian women are also to be found working the mines, in quarries in foundries, building railroads, acting as sailors and boatmen, or like those of Holland, dragging barges in place of horses on the canals, or like those of other European countries, performing the most severe and repulsive agricultural labors. A correspondent of the "Cincinnati Commercial" traveling through Belgium, said: "No work seems to be done except by woman and dogs. With few exceptions women do the harvesting, working like oxen." The physiological fact that the kind of labor and the kind of food affect the physical frame is noticeable in Belgium the same as in France and England. Women of all ages from fourteen to sixty, work in the coal mines, married women sometimes carrying babies strapped to their backs into the pit, laying the infants near them while digging coal, some mine owners refusing to employ a miner unless he can bring one or more members of his family into the pit with him. Employers prefer girls and women because of their lower wages and greater docility; for twelve hours work a woman receives but thirty cents. Even in little Montenegro, husbands lend their wives to each other during the harvest season, and an exceptionally strong or quick-moving wife finds exceptional demand for her services. This little state degrades woman to still greater extent than her sister countries, as they there form the beasts of burden in war, and are counted among the "animals" belonging to the prince.

The Russian peasant woman under the Greek church, finds life equally a burden, and is even to greater extent than in most countries the slave of her husband and the priest, no form of labor or torture being looked upon as too severe to impose upon her.

The women are much more industrious than the men and the hardest work is done by them. As Russia is primarily an agricultural country it possesses immense fields of hay, oats and wheat, the work largely performed by women. The wheat sown broadcast is either harvested with sickles or the old-fashioned scythe with a broad blade. Women do the entire work of gathering up, binding and stacking the wheat, neighbors during harvest helping each other. Women of every age from the young girl to the aged grandmother, take part, assembling at day-break. Horses are also there in number for carrying food, water, extra implements, and the men and boys of the conclave. The women, however aged, walk; the day's work lasting over eighteen hours or from daybreak until dark; in that northern land at harvest time it continues light from 3 a.m. to 9:30 p.m. Nor are mothers with young infants excused from this toil. Babies are carried into the fields where they lie all day under trees, or partially sheltered by a bough over them, covered with insects from which the mother can find no time to relieve them. Under such circumstances of neglect, it is not surprising that infant mortality is excessive. Nor do the children of a slightly larger growth receive the care requisite for their tender years, and it is estimated that eight out of every ten children in Russia die under ten years of

age. But no one form of Christianity monopolizes the wrong. Everywhere, under every name and sect, man has thrown the carrying out of his "curse" on to woman. Italy, the center of Catholicism, under a careful analysis of statistics, showing that the wages of the Italian working woman do not exceed four pence a day. In Venice a traveler was recently shown some wonderfully beautiful articles of clothing; scarfs, shawls, mantles, handkerchiefs, many of them requiring six months' for the production; expressing amazement at the astonishingly low price demanded for such exquisite fabrics was told, "we pay our young girls but seven cents a day." A correspondent of the Philadelphia "Press," writing from abroad in 1885, declared the debasement of woman to be more thorough and complete in Protestant Stockholm than in any city of northern Europe, as there she supplanted the beasts of burden. He spoke of her as doing all the heavy work on buildings and paid only one kronor (equivalent to a trifle over twenty-six cents) for a hard day of this toil. He found women sweeping the streets, hauling rubbish, dragging hand-carts up the hills and over the cobble-stones, unloading bricks at the quays, attending to the parks, doing the gardening and rowing the numerous ferries which abound in that city . . .